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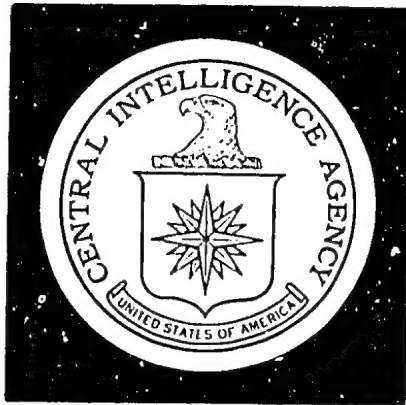
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DIRECTORATE OF  
INTELLIGENCE

# Intelligence Memorandum

*Communist Supply Losses In Northern Laos, Summer 1971*

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ER IM 71-184  
September 1971



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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY  
Directorate of Intelligence  
September 1971

INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

COMMUNIST SUPPLY LOSSES IN NORTHERN LAOS  
SUMMER 1971

Introduction

1. In the traditional manner of the war in northern Laos, pro-government irregulars took the tactical initiative with the onset of the 1971 rainy season. Led by Meo General Vang Pao, the government offensive has retaken much of the Plaine des Jarres. It has resulted in the capture or destruction of substantial amounts of Communist foodstuffs as well as smaller amounts of arms and ammunition. Though not officially terminated, the operation has made only minor gains during the past two months, and it now appears that its period of most lucrative successes has passed. This memorandum briefly discusses the logistical implications of enemy supply losses suffered during the course of the summer.

Discussion

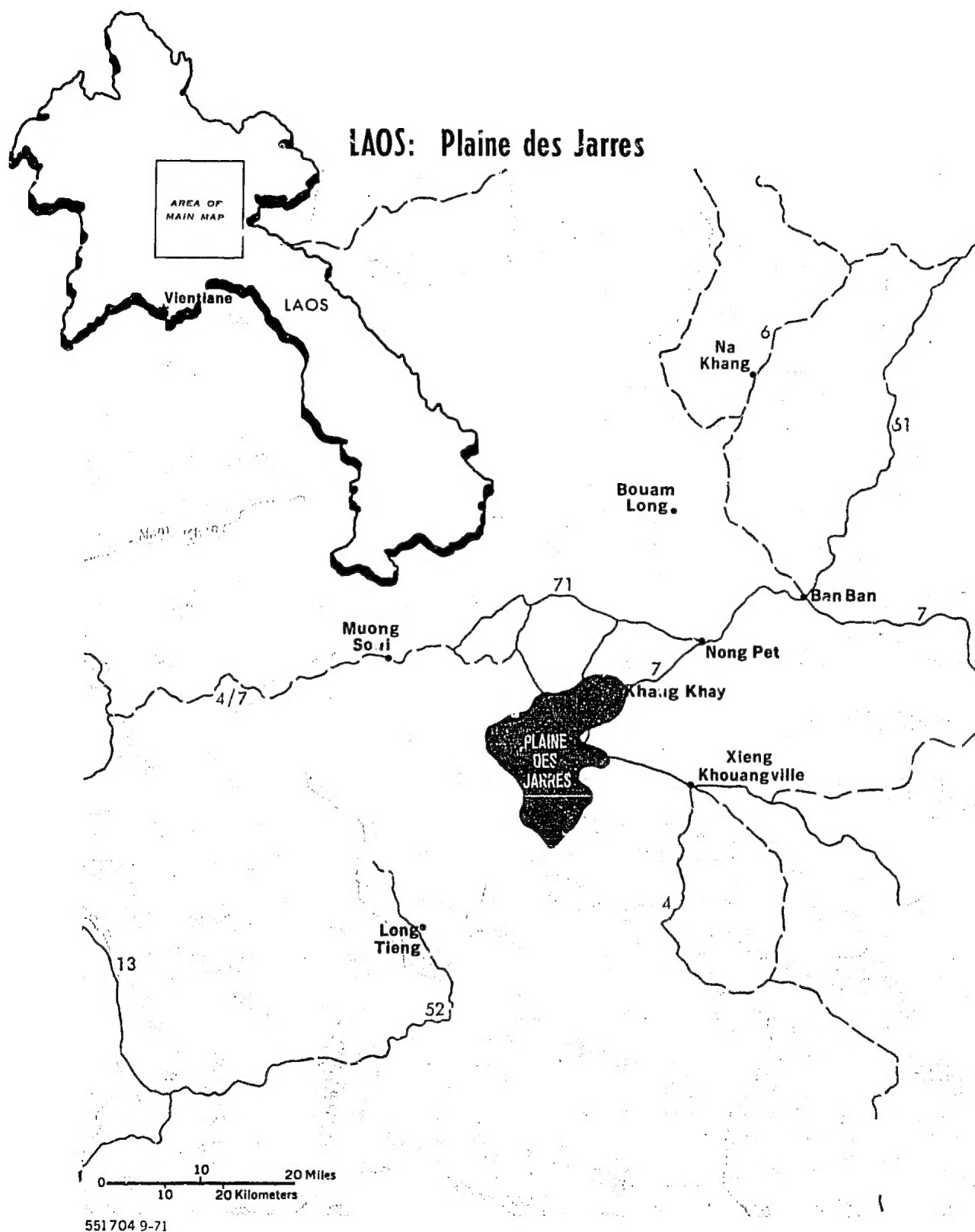
Background

2. On 3 June, with the beginning of the rainy season, pro-government irregular forces launched an operation to clear Communist forces from the southern and western Plaine des Jarres. An important objective of the drive was the capturing of supplies southwest of the Plaine. Related to this (see the map), was Vang Pao's desire to cut Route 7 in the vicinity of Nong Pet, an accomplishment which he believed would hamper the enemy's ability to maintain a viable resistance or mount a counteroffensive. By commanding the Plaine and the infiltration routes toward Long Tieng, Vang Pao hoped to eliminate the Communist foothold in that area.

*Note: This memorandum was prepared by the Office of Economic Research and coordinated within CIA.*

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3. By late July, the irregulars had achieved their most significant accomplishments. Against only token resistance, they had gained control over virtually all of the Plaine with the exception of the northeast sector around Khang Khay. Over 90% of the campaign's supply captures to date had been seized. In the face of increasing North Vietnamese pressure, the irregular's momentum dwindled and by late August the initiative appeared to have changed hands. While the Communist initiative does not yet resemble a full-fledged counteroffensive, it is clear that they do not intend to offer the irregulars any additional easy victories.

#### Communist Supply Losses

4. Since the onset of the rainy season operation, irregulars have uncovered numerous Communist supply caches. During June and July, losses were reported on almost a daily basis as Vang Pao advanced into new areas and as patrols continued their clearing operations in areas already in irregular hands. As the operation slowed down, supply captures became more sporadic. Supplies captured or destroyed through 7 September total almost 1,000 short tons, as shown in the following tabulation:<sup>(1)</sup>

	<u>Short Tons</u>
<i>Total</i>	980
Food	866
Ammunition and explosives	85
Weapons	12
Equipment	4
Petroleum	13

*1. This tabulation is based on a field wrapup of losses through 7 September. No allowance for packaging of weapons and ammunition has been made in the estimates which should be considered "net." A detailed breakout of the reported captures is shown in the Appendix.*

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5. The tabulation shows that foodstuffs have comprised most - 88% - of the captures: of the 866 tons of foodstuffs, rice has accounted for 831 tons, with the remainder being mostly salt and packaged rations. At current force levels in the Plaine area, the rice captures would meet the Communist consumption requirement for at least 2-1/2 months. Heavy weapons ammunition comprises the bulk of the ammunition captured, the most important being some 53 tons of 120-mm mortar and 122-mm rocket rounds.<sup>(2)</sup> The weapons total of 12 tons primarily reflects the capture or destruction of three 85-mm field guns and one 122-mm howitzer. Equipment losses include primarily quartermaster items and some medical supplies which should be easy to replace.

6. The current losses can be put into a certain perspective by comparing them with losses incurred during other Allied drives in Indochina during the past two years. In 1969, two irregular operations in northern Laos, About Face (August-December) and Xieng Khouang (April-May), turned up totals of 6,323 and 1,574 tons<sup>(3)</sup> of supplies, respectively - a large percentage of the captures in those operations was weapons and ammunition. In comparison with the 1969 successes, the current offensive in the Plaine has resulted in a much less impressive amount of materiel captured or destroyed. The 1969 offensives, however, went much further than the current one, with government forces moving far enough east of the Plaine along Route 4 to occupy the town of Xieng Khouangville and northeast to the point of operation at the Route 7/71 junction in the Nong Pet area. Numerous very large caches were uncovered in both the Xieng Khouangville area and in the area along Route 7 between Khang Khay on the northeastern edge of the Plaine and Nong Pet. The enemy's "rear" storage areas suffered very sizable losses and disruption. (The possibility that the 1969 losses were somewhat exaggerated by irregular units reporting them should not be dismissed.) During the Cambodian incursions in the spring of 1970, Allied forces uncovered about 9,200 tons of cached supplies, and in February-March 1971 South Vietnamese forces captured or destroyed approximately 2,500 tons of supplies in the Laos Perhandle.<sup>(4)</sup>

7. Although figures cited in the preceding paragraph are substantially greater than losses in northern Laos during the past summer, an important

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2. *Reporting on Communist ammunition expenditures in northern Laos is too fragmentary to enable a comparison to be made between these losses and daily requirements.*

3. *"Gross" tonnage figures.*

4. *Both figures are "net" estimates. Communist supply losses due to irregular operations in northern Laos during the summer of 1970 were minimal as neither side made impressive territorial gains.*

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consideration in comparing them is that the former losses were incurred in the enemy's "rear" areas, whereas the current losses have been sustained in areas well forward of storage depots in northern Laos. This fact takes on significance in the light of an important characteristic of the logistical network in northern Laos - its inadequacy in meeting supply needs west of the Plaine. Traditionally, the Communists have had little difficulty in moving supplies into storage areas around Ban Ban, which has served as the their "hub" of logistical activity. Having reached the Plaine, however, the supply distribution system begins to break down and difficulties arise. The North Vietnamese have not yet chosen to establish a cohesive logistical organization (such as Binh Trams 11 and 13 which operate east of the Plaine) to oversee and coordinate logistical activity on the Plaine. The problem is further complicated to the west, where the movement of supplies to the extremities of the Plaine and in particular to areas beyond the Plaine is severely hindered by the lack of an adequate system of lines of communication.

8. Within this setting, the quantity of supplies captured through early September may have reached significant levels. Those captured off the southwestern perimeter of the Plaine will be the most difficult to replace with the already inadequate logistic system seriously disrupted. The losses on the Plaine itself - where the heaviest concentrations of captures have taken place - will be easier to replace, but even this will take time. While the supply losses should not be critical in terms of immediate Communist plans, because most of the Communist force structure has redeployed away from the areas where the caches are being found, the enemy's future prospects southwest of the Plaine - insofar as logistics is a factor - are more open to question. Before they can undertake major offensive activity there during the 1971-72 dry season, the Communists will probably want to recoup most of the supply losses suffered this summer.

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July the North Vietnamese regrouped their forces to block any further advances by General Vang Pao's forces into high ground east of the Plaine. While they massed to protect the eastern edge of the Plaine because of its overall military significance, they undoubtedly were also concerned over the possibility of losing numerous supply storage facilities there.

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### Assessment

10. Viewed solely from the point of view of hurting enemy logistical capabilities in northern Laos, the summer's pro-government operation gained some measure of success. The capture of nearly 1,000 tons of enemy supplies and the disruption of supply corridors and caches on and west of the Plaine des Jarres will have some impact. Although the tonnage is not large, it is particularly impressive when viewed as "forward caches" which will take time to replace. In addition to replacing the supply losses, the Communists will now need to refurbish much of their logistic network southwest of the Plaine.

11. In other respects, the operation made only minor gains. The Communists' primary storage complexes from the Khang Khay area of the northeastern Plaine east along the major LOC system remained virtually untouched by the advances. Presumably large arms and ammunition reserves remain intact in those areas.

12. In sum, the Communists have been hurt most significantly in their ability to operate west and southwest of the Plaine. The availability of large quantities of supplies just east of the Plaine should allow them to maintain an offensive on the Plaine largely at their discretion. Their offensive capability to the west, however, will be delayed by the need to refurbish the logistically disrupted areas. The North Vietnamese priorities with regard to northern Laos in the forthcoming months will largely influence how rapidly they undertake and accomplish this task. At a minimum, however, the summer's operation should be credited with putting a crimp in the enemy's offensive planning for the upcoming 1971-72 dry season.

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## APPENDIX

Cumulative List of Supplies  
Captured in the Plaine des Jarres Area  
During the Period 3 June-7 September 1971

## Weapons:

Total weight: 12 tons

	<u>Number</u>
AK-47 rifles	112
SKS carbines	49
M-1 rifles	4
M-16 rifles	40
Pistols	1
RPD light machineguns	11
12.7-mm heavy machineguns	4
57-mm recoilless rifles	9
75-mm recoilless rifles	1
82-mm recoilless rifle	1
Browning automatic rifles	2
RPG rocket launchers	6
B-40 rocket launchers	11
60-mm mortars	3
120-mm mortars	3
85-mm field guns	3
122-mm howitzer	1
Claymore mines	60
Land mines	323

## Ammunition:

Total weight: 85 tons

	<u>Number of Rounds</u>	<u>Weight (Pounds)</u>
7.62-mm	64,800	3,036
12.7-mm (heavy machinegun)	27,220	9,660
40-mm	866	6,924
60-mm mortar	492	1,968
75-mm	40	1,600
76-mm tank	95 (cases)	1,920
82-mm	3,316	29,844
85-mm	240	8,400
107-mm	40	420
120-mm/122-mm rocket	1,879	105,377
Grenades	92	184
Explosives		165

## Foodstuffs:

Total weight: 866 tons

	<u>Tons</u>
Rice	831
Salt	15
Other	20

## Petroleum:

Total weight: 13 tons

## Equipment:

Total weight: 4 tons

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